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SIR WALTER SCOTT AND CHAUCER

In Chapter X of the *Antiquary*, Scott quotes a stanza from the poem formerly attributed to Chaucer, *The Flower and the Leaf*. Throughout the novel, as well as in others of his works, Chaucer is spoken of in terms of admiration, and even affection. A number of quotations from the *Canterbury Tales*, and from his other poems, are given in various places. In view of this evident fondness for Chaucer, it is interesting to note that the passage mentioned above is quoted incorrectly. His version follows:

Lo! here be oakis grete, streight as a lime,
Under the which the grass, so fresh of line,
Be'th newly sprung—at eight foot or nine.
Everich tree well from his fellow grew,
With branches broad laden with leaves new,
That sprongen out against the sonne sheene,
Some golden red, and some a glad bright greene.

Compare this with Skeat's edition:

In which were okës grete, streight as a lyne,
Under the which the gras, so fresh of hew,
Was newly spronge; and an eight foot or nyne
Every tree wel fro his felawe grew,
With branches brode, laden with leves new,
That sprongen out ayein the sonnë shene,
Som very rede, and som a glad light grene.

It will be noted that there are several important differences, aside from mere variations in spelling. In lines 1 and 2, the change destroys the meaning, as well as the rime-scheme of the stanza. In the last line, *golden* is substituted for *very*, and *bright* for *light*. In line 3, *be'th* appears for *was*, and in 4, *everich* for *every*. In Scott, the stanza begins, *Lo! here be*, etc.; in Skeat, *In which were*, etc. In line 6, we read *against* for *ayein*, and *sheene* for *shene*. Of course the punctuation varies widely in different editions of Chaucer, but Scott's use of the period at the end of line 3 changes the sense entirely.

What, then, is the source of the novelist's version? Did his copy of Chaucer contain the stanza as he gives it? According to Miss Hammond's bibliography, there had been six edi-

tions of Chaucer, or collections of English poetry, containing *The Flower and the Leaf*, prior to the publication of the *Antiquary* in 1816. These editions were those of Speght, 1558 (reprinted in 1602 and 1687); Urry, 1721; Bell, in *The Poets of Great Britain*, 1782; Anderson, in *Works of the British Poets*, 1793; Chalmers, in *Works of the English Poets*, 1810; and Todd, in *Illustrations from the Lives and Writings of Gower and Chaucer*, 1810. To these may be added the modernization of Dryden, 1700. In none of these collections do the variations found in Scott's quotation appear. The spelling varies somewhat in these different works, but with reference to the instances given, as well as in certain other cases, Scott's reading does not reproduce any of them. It seems evident that Scott did not copy *verbatim* from any existing edition.

Did he, then, quote inaccurately from memory? An incident is related in Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, and also in Hogg's *Anecdotes of Scott*, which shows that he had an excellent memory for verse, being able to quote long passages with ease. This is incidentally confirmed by a letter of his, quoted by William Platt in *Notes and Queries* 6.4.279:

"The scraps of poetry which have been in most cases tacked to the beginning of the chapters of my novels are sometimes quoted, either from reading or memory, but in the general case, are pure invention. . . . I drew on my memory as long as I could, and when that failed, eked it out with invention."

Is it possible that in the instance we are considering, he relied on his memory without verification, and failed to quote correctly?

It seems to be commonly agreed that Scott is not at all accurate in his historical facts. Among others who have pointed out historical errors are N. W. Senior in his *Essays on Fiction*, Yonge in his *Life of Scott*, and W. H. Hudson in his *Sir Walter Scott*. As to his scholarship in general, Rev. G. R. Gleig, in his *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (p. 25) has this to say:

"He never took the trouble to make himself an accurate scholar. Enough for him if he could extract the meaning, or take in the beauties of his author. For whether it was an

ancient book which came his way—whether an Italian, a Spanish, a German, or a Latin classic, his sole object in perusing it was to pick out from it the ideas which recommended themselves to his taste and judgment. In no single instance did he dream of making it the means of ascertaining far less of settling, the niceties of idiom or of grammar.”

In several numbers of *Notes and Queries*, cases of misquotation in Scott's works have been pointed out. In 4.5.577, “F” cites a case where a passage from the *Gospel of Saint Matthew* is quoted inaccurately in both *Waverley* and the *Abbot*, differing in each place. He gives other misquotations, from the *Merchant of Venice* in the *Abbot*, and from *Macbeth* in the *Monastery*. In 4.5.486, the same writer cites two cases from the *Bride of Lammermoor*, and says there are many others in his novels. In 4.6.200, J. S. Udall notes a misquotation from *Saint Matthew* in the *Heart of Mid-Lothian*, and J. H. J. Oakley in 4.10.184 gives three Latin passages misquoted in the *Antiquary*. The last named writer remarks:

“When the author of *Waverley* described the Baron of Bradwardine as ‘a scholar according to the scholarship of Scotchmen—that is, his learning was more diffuse than accurate, and he was rather a reader than a grammarian,’ he has given us a pretty true account of his own scholarship.”

An examination of other quotations in the *Antiquary* shows that several passages not hitherto remarked are also incorrect in detail. In quoting from *II Henry IV*, he has *fico* for *foutre*; five lines from *I Henry IV* are quoted correctly as a heading for Chapter XVI, but are given as from Part II. In Chapter III he quotes from *Hudibras*, and adds two lines which are not a part of the passage. Quotations from *King John*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and Wordsworth's *Fountain*, are also inaccurate. In *Woodstock*, elsewhere in the *Antiquary*, and in his review of Godwin's *Life of Chaucer*, quotations from Chaucer vary considerably from the standard editions.

Considering Scott's frequent allusions to Chaucer, he should have known the poet well. In the *Edinburgh Review* we find an extensive

review of *Godwin's Life of Chaucer*. His comparisons are mainly with Tyrwhitt's edition, which is also mentioned in his review of Ellis' *Specimens of the Early English Poets*. But Tyrwhitt does not reprint *The Flower and the Leaf*, and mentions it only to doubt its authenticity. Scott mentions Warton's *History of English Poetry*, but this does not contain the poem, though there is a discussion of it. In his edition of Dryden's works, he expresses his admiration for *The Flower and the Leaf*, especially of Dryden's modernization.

If Scott occasionally misquoted, from undue reliance on his memory, he is not alone in this respect among English writers; but such extensive variations from his original as are disclosed by the passage from the *Antiquary* are not a little surprising.

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ON THE TWO PLACE-NAMES IN “THANATOPSIS”

Take the wings

Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound
Save his own dashings—yet the dead are there.
William Cullen Bryant, “*Thanatopsis*.”

The Barcan wilderness and the Oregon are the only place-names used in the whole poem. Readers may have frequently asked themselves why just these particular places should have occurred to the poet's mind, when he wished to symbolize the whole world as a sepulcher of the dead.

The explanation is to be found in the current and local interest which two events had for the poet.

Bryant was born in Cummington in the northwestern part of Hampshire county, Mass., and was educated there and later at Williams College in the northwestern corner of Berkshire county. His chief reading, aside from his father's well-stocked library, was the *Hampshire Gazette*. His outlook on the world was